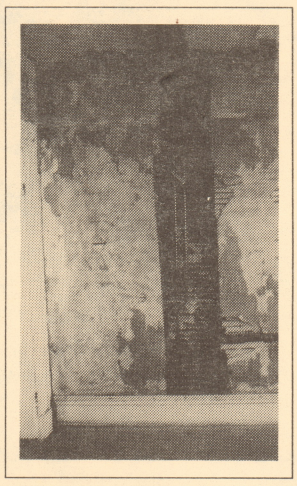
WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY - Founded December 17, 1857 MARCH 1997

# WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS

KAREN'S COLUMN

## SUCH GOOD NEWS! WCHS RECEIVES $11,000 GRANT TO RESTORE INTERIOR OF MUSEUM ON MAIN STREET



Such good news! In the November issue of the Impressions, I mentioned that the Historical Society was applying for a grant to be used to do some interior restoration at the Museum house.

Our grant proposal requested award of federal funds available for historic preservation, distributed through the Michigan Department of State.

Application was made through Washtenaw County, a Certified Local Government. On February 12 we received notification that our application had been accepted for funding!

In the grant request we asked for a total of $18,300. Of this amount, WCHS will receive $11,000, or 60%. We will be expected to provide 40% or $7,300. The money will be used to restore the walls, ceilings, floors and windows on the interior of our Museum.

Quinn Evans Architects will prepare the documents we need to have the work competitively bid. Once these plans are approved in Lansing, we will sign a contract with the work.

We must expend the total cost of $18,300 before we will be reimbursed the $11,000. Learning to administer federal funds will be something new for us, a challenge that we are very willing to assume!

Thanks go to Eve Wuttke, Washtenaw County Metropolitan Planning Commission's administrative coordinator until her recent retirement. Her help in getting the grant proposal into the right channels at the right time was invaluable.

James Krupa of Acclaim Construction also assisted greatly. Pauline Walters and her computer made the whole thing look very professional, every page--and there were a lot of pages!

Karen Koykka O'Neal
665-2242

## DUMOUCHELLE GALLERY APPRAISER WILL EVALUATE HAND-CARRIED ANTIQUES SATURDAY, APRIL 12

Would you like to know the value of some of your favorite antiques? You can find out and help WCHS too.

WCHS will sponsor an appraisal event from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturday, April 12, 1997, at Dixboro United Methodist Church. An appraiser from the Dumouchelle Gallery in Detroit will be on hand to evaluate items.

You can have up to three items that you can carry in appraised. A written appraisal will be $15 each, verbal appraisal $10.

In addition, Pam Newhouse will demonstrate spinning and Karen Simpson, quilting. The WCHS signature quilt will be available for signing.

Refreshments and the WCHS museum shop items will be on sale.

Dixboro Church, 5221 Church St., is off Plymouth Rd. just east of Cherry Hill Rd. There will be a half-hour break at 12:30 p.m. ***Questions? Call 663-2379.***

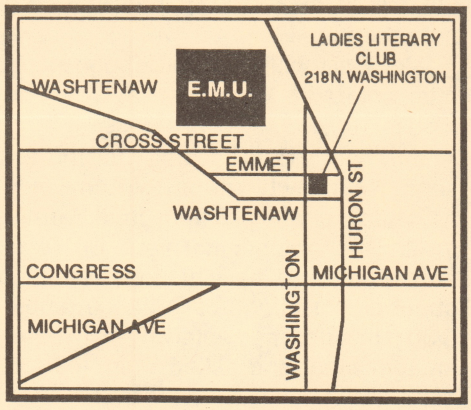
## STORY OF WASHTENAW'S EARLY PLANT NURSERY TO BE TOLD MARCH 16

The story of an early plant nursery in Washtenaw County and the Ezra Lay family who started it will be told at the WCHS meeting at 2 p.m. Sunday, March 16, at the Ladies' Literary Club, 218 North Washington Street, Ypsilanti.

Mary Culver, a historic preservation consultant who earned a master's degree in historic preservation from Eastern Michigan University and has a special interest in Greek Revival architecture, will present the program. The 1834 Greek Revival Lay home is still standing.

Take Washtenaw Avenue east past the water tower to Washington Street, turn left one block to club house at corner of Emmet.

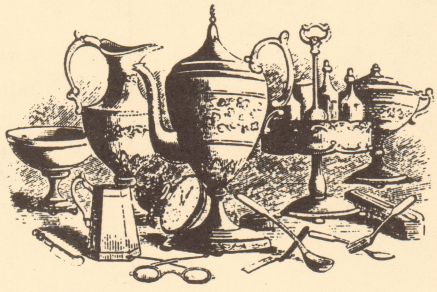
Parking on street and usually in nearby church lots.




## WCHS HAS 3,261 POINTS, NEW GOAL TO BE SET

WCHS has collected 3,261 Knapp's Restaurant points toward a new goal to be set. Please keep collecting.

Any one who eats at Knapp's may request a yellow points slip from the cashier each time. One point is given for each dollar spent. Please give or send to Alice Ziegler, 537 Riverview Dr., Ann Arbor, MI 48104.



# THE STORY OF ANN ALLEN, ANN ARBOR'S FIRST LADY

"I've been collecting material on Ann Allen for many years. I guess I was always a little bit reluctant to actually sit down and write a formal biography, Dr. Russell Bidlack told the February WCHS audience.

"I'm not really a superstitious person but in the course of my gradual research I learned that in 1915 a woman named Katherine Anderson, a local DAR historian, decided she would write a biography of Ann Allen. She went down to Virginia to gather material in 1915, came back and died in 1916.

"Then, in 1925, Caroline Campbell of Grand Rapids, a very prominent local historian of the state, was so disturbed by the fact that so little was known about Ann Allen when the centennial of Ann Arbor was celebrated in 1924 that she set out to write a biography of Ann.

"She went down to Virginia, discovered the family was not awfully cordial because they never knew what happened to Mrs. Anderson who had borrowed a fair number of precious papers that were not returned.

"Mrs. Campbell came back, soon thereafter entered a local hospital here and died in 1926.

"Just before I had decided what the last sentence in my biography of Ann would be, I had a phone call from Jane Warner inviting me to dinner that night. But I was so delighted to have it done, I forgot about dinner. Jane called again about 6:30 p.m. after I had eaten my own rather meager meal and asked, 'Did you forget?'

"I apologize again Jane, but I think I had a reason--I was so glad to be alive to have finished it.

"Then there was another little incident on January 22, Ann's actual birthday. Connie Dunlap had a little dinner at which I spoke and for that she made a video tape. She delivered a copy of it to me the next day.

"After I put it on my machine it was blank. I called her and said I know I'm dead now, there's nothing on the tape. Well, she found another copy and it's there so I am here.

"Ann Isabella Barry McCue Allen was born January 22,1797. George Washington was still president though he would give the title over to John Adams in another six weeks. She was born in Staunton, a town in Augusta County, Virginia, on the pike between Lexington and Winchester. Winchester was a famous spot during the Civil War.

Michigan Historical Collections, Bentley Library

**Ann Allen about 1860, the only photo ever taken of her.**

Seventy-eight years later, on November 27,1875, Ann died in Augusta County about ten miles from the place she was born.

"Of her 78 years, 18 had been spent in Ann Arbor, a town named for her, between 1824 and 1844 with two years out while her husband and she were in New York City where he expected to make a fortune.

"Family was very important in Ann's life so let me tell you a little bit about Ann's parents.

"Thomas Barry, her father, was born in 1767 near Londonderry, Ireland. He was not a true Irishman however. The Barry family was French.

"In a letter Ann wrote in 1867 to a nephew she claimed that they were of the nobility. I doubt that they were quite that high but they did have a coat of arms and were very proud of their French heritage.

"Several generations earlier the family had been converted to Calvinism and they were known as Huguenots. Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes, which years before had given civil liberties to these French Protestants, and ordered that every French person be baptized as Roman Catholic.

"Roughly 400,000 French Huguenots gradually slipped out of France. There was not a mass exit--they went out by twos and threes. Thomas Barry's great-grandfather, Richard Barry, was one of those who slipped out, carrying with him a testament published in 1668 in Paris in the French language.

"Ann's grandmother, Thomas's mother, was of Scotch-Irish ancestry in Ireland. Sarah McKim great-grandfather had been knighted by King William III, William of Orange, following the siege of Londonderry, something of which they were always very proud.

At age 20 Thomas Barry had come to Baltimore, following a rich cousin who happened to have been reared by his mother. This rich cousin, John McKim, was in the mercantile business and was one of the richest men in Baltimore at that time, 1787.

"Thomas came to learn the mercantile business which I learned recently had some aspects of piratism also which accounted for some of the wealth.

"So Thomas was trained in the mercantile business and his rich cousin set him up as a merchant in Kent County, Maryland, on the eastern shore, about 1790. It was there he fell in love with a planter's daughter whose name was Ann Isabella Smith.

"Health problems plagued Thomas on the eastern shore. He thought it was the damp weather and he decided he should go elsewhere. Staunton, Virginia, was then known as a health spa with its springs--warm and cold and hot. A great many rich people were flocking to Staunton.

"Staunton was considered to be a healthy place and I suspect from later events that Thomas Barry was in early stages of tuberculosis. So it was that Thomas and his wife moved to Staunton.

The following year on January 22,1797 their only child was born and named Agnes. I'll tell you why later that our town is not called Agnes Arbor.

"Thomas's younger brother, Andrew Barry, followed his brother and went through the same procedure of being taught by his rich cousin in Baltimore and then joined Thomas in Staunton.

"Nine days after Ann Smith Barry gave birth to her daughter the young mother died, not an unusual occurrence in those times. So Thomas Barry found himself a widower with a baby. He arranged for a neighbor lady to take her into her home, the home that interestingly enough stood almost on the same spot where a future United States president would be born, Woodrow Wilson, in 1856.

Thomas died in January 1800. On his

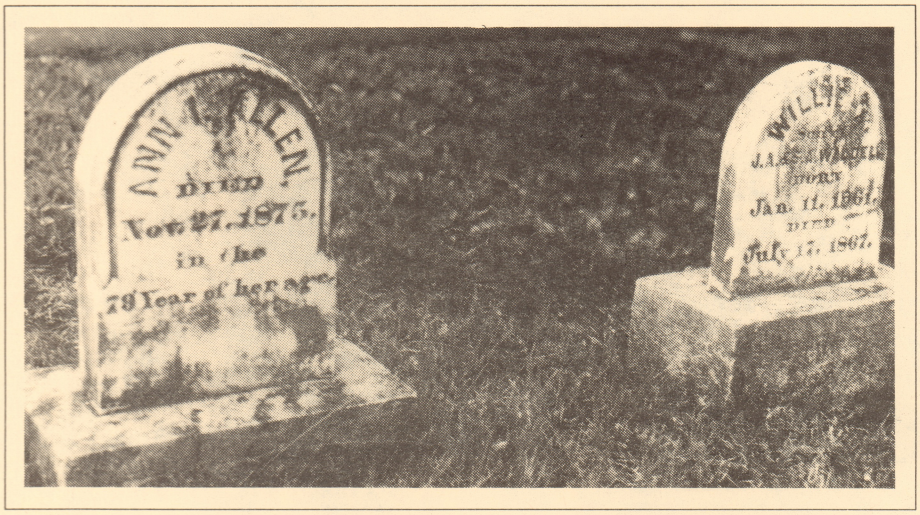



Photo by Russell Bidlack

**Gravestone of Ann Allen with grandson's nearby in what is called the new cemetery of Augusta Stone Presbyterian Church near Ft. Defiance, Virginia.**

death bed, I think from TB he had been suffering from earlier, he requested that his daughter's name be changed from Agnes to Ann Isabella in memory of his wife, and so Ann was left at age three still in the care of this neighbor lady.

"In those days merely telling the family to change the name was sufficient. There was no legal document required. Happily a granddaughter recalled that story.

"When Mrs. Campbell went to Virginia to do research she discovered this will naming the daughter Agnes and she thought there was some terrible scandal involved but there wasn't at all.

"Thomas Barry had made his will the summer before his death. He had been a very successful merchant during his years in Staunton so he was able to leave a rather large amount of money for his daughter, 2,000 pounds, with instructions to his cousin in Baltimore, who was a banker as well as a merchant, to invest it in bank stock and it should then be given to his daughter either when she married or when she reached the age of 21.

He also said they could dip into this money to give her a proper education, a little unusual in those days for a little girl. He also asked that, if possible, she be sent back to Ireland to her grandmother, Thomas's mother.

"So she went to Baltimore, into the mansion of the McKim's and waited there until they could arrange for what is known as a trusty nurse to take her to Ireland.

"There, she, as a little girl, was welcomed by open arms of an Irish grandmother.

"Before this, Thomas had begged his mother to come to America, after all he and Andrew were both here, but she had a married daughter, Ellen, and the daughter had not wanted to come.

"But, in 1806, just two years after Ann had gone to Ireland to be with her grandmother, the grandmother and Aunt Ellen decided that they would come to America to help take care of Andrew's son whose mother had died.

"So Ann came back in 1806. When she had gone to Ireland in 1804 they sent the Bible back, Thomas having brought it when he came. I think it was probably thought of as something of a good luck charm. After all, the great-great-grandfather had carried it out of France to Ireland safely and Thomas had brought it to America in 1787 and then when the daughter was sent to Ireland, the Bible was sent back with her and when the grandmother came in 1806 they brought the Bible back.

"As I said, it is the New Testament with Psalms and Huguenot catechism in French language.

"Back in America, Ann spent some time with her grandmother, then went to Staunton to be with the other son, Andrew Barry. It was decided that Ann should be tutored by the local Presbyterian minister in Staunton. That was the only way a girl could be educated at the time in that area. There were no girls' schools as such. Ministers frequently served as tutors for daughters of well-to-do people in the area.

"After a year or so it was decided she should then go to a Dr. Hill, who was quite a well-known Presbyterian minister in Winchester so she lived with the Hill family while being further educated.

"About 1810, possibly 1811, it was decided that she had learned all that Dr. Hill could teach her and she should go back to Baltimore to be further educated under the direction of John McKim.

"She was sent to what was called a seminary for boys and girls, though mainly girls. It was conducted by a celebrated French lady. Ann was about 12 or 13 years old at this point.

"I have no description of Ann as a girl but in one of her later letters describing her own daughter's appearance at age 11, I have a feeling that this was maybe how Ann looked at the same age.

"Writing to a son in 1834, Ann Allen wrote:

'Sarah Ann enjoys good health but is very slender and delicate. She is a very lively child, full of mirth and glee. She is a very affectionate child to me and every one. It is her natural disposition.'

"Baltimore, when Ann went back for her education in the seminary, had a population of 50,000. It was a big city, a medical center at the time.

"To my amazement, when reading about this, I discovered that cataracts were actually being removed from eyes in Baltimore by a surgeon. There was no anesthetic so you can imagine what an ordeal it was with several men trying to hold the patient down, but it was actually being done.

"There also was a very promising medical student from Staunton studying in Baltimore at that time. He was of a well-known family. His father was the Rev. John McCue, a wealthy man with many slaves and many acres of land as well as being a Presbyterian minister.

"Perhaps there had even been some acquaintance of Ann as a little girl with Dr. McCue who was ten years her senior. In any case they became acquainted in Baltimore, perhaps they even fell in love.

"The War of 1812 came along. John McKim was much involved on the American side. Baltimore was very much a divided city. There were riots, there were murders and John McKim decided the safest place for Ann was back in Virginia so he sent her back. She went to live with Uncle Andrew in a little village named Mossy Creek near Staunton.

"At the same time young Dr. William McCue returned to Virginia having completed his education. He also decided he would begin practice in Mossy Creek. He and Ann were married on January 20, 1813. Ann was 16 years old. With her marriage she inherited the money that had grown to a considerable amount.

"I have a feeling that part of her attraction to Dr. McCue was this fortune. Perhaps I'm mistaken. A guardian had been

appointed for Ann but his rule ended when she married.

"Dr. McCue then decided to take up practice in Lexington. Ann purchased a farm nearby, 287 acres. She paid $5,700 of her money. He acquired slaves and became a gentleman farmer along with being a physician. The five years that followed from 1813-1818 I suspect were the happiest years of Ann's life.

"She was a Southern lady. I have recently read a book by Drew Faust, a professor at Princeton, called *Mothers of Invention*, based on letters that Southern ladies wrote to their husbands during the Civil War when suddenly they could no longer play the role of a Southern lady.

"Although I had written about Ann before I read the book I was pleased to discover that I had described her properly as a Southern lady according to Dr. Faust.

"This meant she was a woman of leisure, performing no physical labor because of house slaves. Ann's house slaves were Connel and his wife, sometimes called Callimed. They figure later in Ann's life as well.

"Interestingly enough, Ann's mother had inherited a slave when her father's estate was settled, and a slave, named Isaac, appears on Dr. McCue's inventory when he died.

"Besides being a lady of leisure, Ann enjoyed what might be called the niceties of life. She loved to read and read extensively. She had fine clothes. Her husband provided what Dr. Faust says every Southern gentleman of that time provided his wife--protection and support. This was what the Southern lady expected of her aristocratic husband.

"In 1816, John McCue, her first son, was born. In 1818 her son, Thomas, was born. Six months later, November 7, 1818, Dr. McCue contracted typhoid fever and died before he was able to write his will.

"Without a will Ann inherited only one-third of the estate, the other two-thirds was set aside for her sons. That was the custom of the time. A brother of her husband was appointed to manage their estate.

"Here Ann was a widow at 21 with two sons. She went to live with James McCue, her husband's brother who had assumed responsibility for managing the inheritance. She was a guest in the James McCue home near Mossy Creek.

"Two-and-a-half years later Ann married a second time to a cousin of her first husband named John Allen. This was on June 7, 1821. John was six months older than Ann. The McCue family were very unhappy about this marriage even though there was a family relationship. Likewise, Andrew Barry was not happy about it.

Courtesy of Russell Bidlack

**'Belvidere,' completed in 1853, as it appears today (top) and earlier picture (below). It was the home of Thomas W. McCue, son of Ann Allen by her first husband. Near Ft. Defiance, Augusta County, Virginia. It served as a hospital during the Civil War Battle of Piedmont.**

"John Allen was a widower with two children of his own which was fine except he was very much in debt as a result of some bad investments made by his father, Col. James Allen.

"I can't go into the story of John Allen today but debts that John assumed for himself for a while on behalf of his father amounted to $40,000, a horrendous amount of money.

"Before the marriage, however, documents on file in the court records of Augusta County prove that John transferred the debts, along with his own farm his father had given him earlier, so that when the creditors foreclosed and took everything, it was the father that had owed the debts for the most part.

"The Barrys and McCues were so disturbed about Ann's marriage to John Allen because they thought financial troubles would result. Of course, Ann still had her third of her first husband's estate--that soon went for debts, also.

"John, with Ann, moved to his unclaimed farm. His two children were with his parents, Col. James and Elizabeth Allen. Throughout their youth they were with their grandparents.

"And, when Ann went with John to John's farm, she left her two sons with James McCue, who had immediately declared himself their guardian, with a $10,000 bond, so they would be protected from their new stepfather.

"On May 10, 1823, Ann Allen gave birth to her only child by John, a daughter, Sarah Ann, the daughter whom I described earlier from the letter. She was named for her grandmother who happened to die the same year in Virginia.

"That autumn Ann with her new daughter moved back to James McCue's home, while John went on a money-making venture to Baltimore.

"The stories passed down by different branches of the family vary somewhat. I have one written record along with the traditions but we know in any case that John took a herd of cattle to Baltimore.

"That was the way you took cattle to market in those days. It's 200 miles to Baltimore from the Staunton area yet to go to market you had to drive the cattle. He must have had some help, a boy or something. Of course these were not really his cattle. Either he had bought them on credit, which is one version, or the cattle actually belonged to the neighbors who couldn't afford to take only one or two to market. According to the other version it was customary to get a herd together in the fall and somebody would volunteer to take them.

"In any case everybody expected John to come back but he did not. Weeks, months passed. According to an account written by the son of James McCue, who grew up with Ann's two sons, it became a general rumor that he'd been murdered.

"Actually, he had sold the cattle for several hundred dollars. He was now 27 years old. He set out for Buffalo. He heard that you could buy government land for $1.25 an acre in such places as

Ohio or Michigan Territory and somewhere he had read about how you could buy $1.25 land--lay out some lots, give some lots to merchants, mechanics, blacksmiths and so on and start a town.

"You could start a town and your property would increase in value so he had this in mind.

"Happily, John Allen kept many of the letters that he received after 1823 and they are now preserved in the Burton Historical Collection in the Detroit Public Library.

Unhappily, John did not keep copies of the letters he wrote but we know from letters he received soon after he arrived here that while in Buffalo he discussed his plan with two different merchants who wrote to him after he got here. One of them referred to his town, in fact addressed his letter, to Allensville, the other to Annapolis. So obviously while in Buffalo he even discussed what he would call his town.

"Meanwhile, back in Virginia, the rumor about murder had been cleared up. The tax collector in 1824 wrote one word after John's name--absconded. That ended John's career in Augusta County.

"After spending November and December, 1823, in Buffalo and getting some advice there, John decided to go to Detroit. It was too late to cross on the lake so he hired a Frenchman to guide him through Canada.

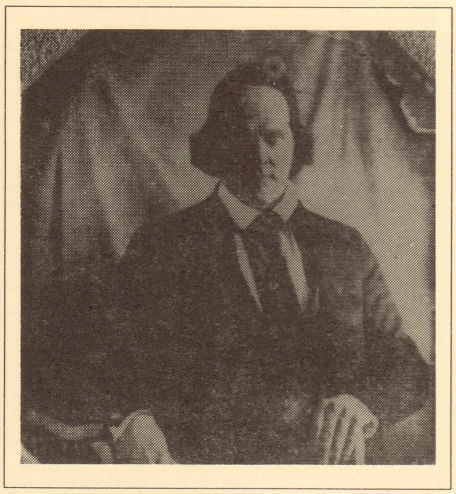
"While in Buffalo, a man named Williams, who had been one of the proprietors of the city of Toledo, had given him a letter of introduction to the governor of Michigan Territory, Governor Lewis Cass. So on arrival in Detroit he presented that letter, still expecting that probably the best place to go would be the Maumee Valley of Ohio.

"However, while in Detroit, I'm sure it was in a tavern--there were five of them in Detroit at that point--he became acquainted with another man who was also looking to buy land but definitely in Michigan Territory.

"This was a man named Elisha Walker Rumsey. He'd always been known as Walker Rumsey back in Genesee County, New York, but when he came to Michigan he told everybody to call him Elisha. I have a letter indicating that this was deliberate--he wanted to change his identity.

"He had some scandal in his life and I can't tell you the story of the Rumseys at this point but he had come to Detroit from a jail in Albany and had been gotten out of jail by his father-in-law, father of his first wife, who was dead.

"But before that he had absconded with $3,000, again having to do with cattle. He also had dreams of buying some land. I don't think he had dreams



Courtesy of Russell Bidlack

**Photograph of John Allen probably taken in California circa 1851.**

of starting a town.

"I think, though I can't prove it, that it was Elisha Rumsey who told John Allen about the possibilities in Michigan as opposed to Ohio and I suspect perhaps Elisha went with him to see Governor Cass.

"Governor Cass may have told him about a trip he had taken along the Huron River and he had discovered there was a very nice spot on the Huron with oak openings that would be a mighty nice place for a village.

"I think that was exactly where Elisha and John set out for in their sleigh in February, 1824, to explore. I think they knew what they were looking for. In any case, they chose the spot that became Ann Arbor and began building.

"How Ann and his parents learned of his whereabouts I'm not sure when it happened. I know they received a letter in August 1824.

"It happened that John had an aunt, Jane Trimble, his father's sister. If you know your Ohio history, there was a Governor Trimble--that was her son. She was back in Virginia visiting relatives. She wrote her son back in Ohio on August 24,1824.

"She said that Col. James Allen had been to the McCue home where she was visiting. (Her daughter had married James McCue.) She said a letter had arrived directing John's father which way to go to Ann Arbor. The wording suggests to me that this was not the first news the parents had about John's whereabouts.

"Ann, too, had received a letter, included in the one to his father, telling her he wanted her to come to Ann Arbor and bring their daughter. He knew very well that her two sons would not be able to come--the guardian would keep them in Virginia.

"The parents were expecting to go because in the foreclosure of all James Allen's land he had been given until October 1,1824, to move out of the mansion. A colonel in the militia, an elder in the Presbyterian Church had come to this bad end.

"Following receipt of those letters there was a prayer meeting. The McCues and Barrys were very devout Presbyterians. They frequently took their problems to prayer. The prayer was whether Ann should go to Michigan Territory, a pioneer in a Yankee land. How long they prayed is a matter of question. One letter says they prayed 24 hours though I can't imagine, even Presbyterians , praying for 24 hours.

"In any case, after the prayer meeting and perhaps being reminded of certain legal matters--after all Ann, when she married John had included the word obey--it was decided Ann would have to go with daughter, Sarah, along with John's parents. Also going were John's younger brother, called Turner Allen, John's two children by his first wife and a school teacher from New England.

"They went by covered wagon. Happily, Turner Allen kept notes and later wrote a detailed account of the journey, exactly how they went, difficulties they had--the wagon tipped over at one point. They had four horses to pull the wagon, three to drive.

"Ann rode almost all the way according to her own statements, carrying her daughter in her lap. She was an experienced rider as were all Southern ladies according to Dr. Faust, primarily because the plantations were so far apart and horseback was the only logical way of transportation. How did they ride? Sidesaddle. Imagine Ann on this almost two month trip riding side saddle.

"Ann greatly feared Indians. Turner Allen told about one time when they were camping near Indians and Ann said, 'Their cattle even low savage.'

"They arrived in Detroit. John was there to meet them; then they went to the new settlement and they arrived October 16,1824. (Once I wrote October 24 for which I apologize.)

"John showed Ann around. I can imagine Ann's shock. Perhaps the best way I can describe that is to quote from a lady arriving two weeks after Ann. This was Harriet Noble who came with her husband, her husband's brother and his wife and nine children in all, from New York.

"They had been there earlier and John helped them find land near Ann Arbor village. They came to take up their land and build their cabins.

"This is what Harriet Noble remembered: 'There were six or seven log huts, occupied by as many inmates as could crawl into them. It was too much to think of asking strangers to give us a place to

stay in even for one night under such circumstances.

'Mr. John Allen, himself, made us the offer of sharing with him the comforts of a shelter from storm if not from cold. The house was large for a log one but quite unfinished. There was a ground floor and a single loft above.' (John's family was in here along with two or three men he hired in Detroit to help build the huts.)

'When we got our things stored in the place we found the number to be sheltered to be 21 women and children and 14 men. There were only two bedsteads in the house and those, who could not occupy these, slept on feather beds on the floor.

'When the children were put to bed you could not set a foot down without stepping on a foot or a hand. The consequence was we had "music" most of the time.

'We cooked our meals in the open air, there being no fire in the house except a small box stove. The fall winds were not very favorable for such business. We would frequently find our clothes on fire.

'We did not often get burned but when one meal was over we dreaded to start the next. We lived in this way until our husbands got a log house with a roof on. That took them six weeks.'

"I imagine Ann was fretting during this period.

"The cabin that had been built by John Allen lasted until they could build a cabin for his parents. Then John's two children by his first wife moved in with their grandparents, as they had always lived with them. John built a fireplace and in February 1825 he wrote a letter to Aunt Jane Trimble which happily survives.

"I'll quote a paragraph. As I talk about him imagine a man who is always optimistic, always striving to be a leader, dreaming great dreams, imagining he would be wealthy as his father once had been, confident.

'We live in a small log house, one room down, one room upstairs or rather up ladder, with a good fireplace and cooking stove by which Ann does the work of our family with ease and none to fret or put her out of temper. When the business of the day is through with and we've seated ourselves around the fire there is none to disturb us. We lie down and rise up contented and happy.'

"I would love to have a letter written by Ann about this.

"Ann was deeply religious She was a Presbyterian. She read a great deal of Presbyterian literature along with other literature.

"She was certainly ill-prepared to be a pioneer wife. She did not find any Southerners in Ann Arbor, the rest of the settlers came from New York and New England. Except for her mother-in-law, she was alone among Yankee settlers.

"She was sometimes referred to in later years as being melancholy. I suspect she had good reason. She had never performed domestic labor before and here she found herself a pioneer among Yankee women who were accustomed to not only working in the house but outdoors as well.

"Furthermore, she had a growing feeling of guilt that she had left two little boys, motherless, back in Virginia. As weeks and months passed she wondered whether they would even remember her. I suspect Ann Allen had relatively few happy days in her 18 years in Ann Arbor.

## AMONG LOTS OF MYTHS OF HOW ANN ARBOR WAS NAMED THE REAL STORY EMERGES FROM HIS RESEARCH

"The plat for Ann Arbor that John Allen and Elisha Rumsey took to Detroit to register to make it legal to start selling lots was dated May 25,1824. It's the first place I've found Ann Arbor written down as 'Annarbour.' spelled the way arbor was before Noah Webster got it simplified, Dr. Russell Bidlack said.

"Ann was not here and wouldn't be here until the following October. Elisha Rumsey's wife, Mary Ann was here.

"There must be at least 20 versions told through the years and recorded here and there about the naming. There were so many different versions that two of them were obviously in jest, making fun of the whole business.

"Elisha Rumsey died in 1827. He was a junior partner of John, never played much of a role, I think. His wife remarried next year and after two or three other moves ended up in Lafayette, Indiana with her second husband, maybe it was the third. She was called a grass widow when Elisha Rumsey ran off with her to Canada.

"That's how he got acquainted with Michigan before he went off to jail but that's another story.

"Some claim the name was chosen to honor Mary Ann Rumsey. I've never found her name any other way but Mary Ann, even on her tombstone. I'm sure her name was Mary Ann. I don't think she was ever called anything but Mary Ann. Mary Arbor would not have been a bad name.

"In any case we have two references to names John Allen was playing with while he was in Buffalo--Allensville and Annapolis.

"The first real historian of Ann Arbor was a woman named Mary H. Clark, famous for the girls school she and her sisters started here in 1836. It lasted for many years and Mary Clark was a real scholar for her time, a botanist of great expertise and very much interested in Ann Arbor history of which she gathered all sorts of material only to have it all burned in 1875.

"Miss Clark was consulted in 1864 when a gazetteer was being planned for Michigan and the editor wanted a description of each town and how they were named. He wrote to Mary Clark and she responded and I imagine she responded more accurately than anyone else.

"She wrote, 'The original site of the village was a burr oak opening having the appearance of an arbor laid out by the hand of taste..'

"Unhappily, between 1924 and 1974 the seal of Ann Arbor was a rickety trellis with a rose bush growing on it because they didn't know what arbor meant. An arbor at that time meant a grove of trees spaced nicely apart with grass growing and sun light coming through them. That's exactly what the oak openings were along the Huron that became Ann Arbor.

"Any one referring to an arbor at that time would not have thought of a grape arbor, wild or tame."

"Happily the city fathers--I think I played a slight role in that--restored the old seal, an oak tree, which lasted for the first hundred years and is appropriate for Ann Arbor."

Continuing with Mary Clark's statement, 'Mrs. Allen always denied all personal claims to this title and declared she could not tell just how it came about. Her husband first proposed Annapolis but she preferred the name Ann Arbor as being more original.'

"A number of people say that both Ann Allen and Mary Ann Rumsey were honored in this. It's conceivable, I suppose, that Elisha Rumsey was agreeable to this name because of it being the middle name of his wife. Though it is questionable whether there ever was a marriage license declaring that. It is claimed that they were married."

"One time she wrote to her son, Thomas, when he had suggested he might come to Ann Arbor to live. She urged him not to. She said the settlers are 'nothing but scapegoats who have made their place as a refuge from creditors for unlawful deeds Unprincipled, they live by art and cunning. He who can outwit his neighbor is the better man'--her view of Yankees.

"John Allen took up Yankee ways himself. He began condemning slavery. He had owned eight slaves that he lost in the father's debts. I suspect Ann never saw the evil in slavery.

"The completion of the Erie Canal in 1825 assured the success of Ann Arbor along with the fact that it had been declared the county seat of Washtenaw. I suspect John Allen knew very well that the canal was about to be completed and knew there would be a flood of migration once that was done and there was.

"John began selling lots rapidly. From the start he prospered in Ann Arbor. As he sold lots he bought more and more land and borrowed money to buy even more land. He was sure that his future wealth would be in Michigan land, still selling at $1.25 an acre, if you had the cash to pay for it.

"He also operated a store and went to New York to buy goods. With his efforts the village was incorporated in 1832 and he was elected the first president, the equivalent of mayor.

"In my biography of Ann [to be published this spring by the Bentley Historical Library] I have the title, *'Ann Arbor's First Lady.'* I base that on the fact that she was a Southern lady. I don't think any other woman in Ann Arbor in her day claimed descent from a man who had been knighted by a king or had the wealth she had been accustomed to. And, as the wife of the mayor, she was in another way a first lady so I think that would be a justifiable title for her at that time.

"Many travelers to America observed, then went back home and wrote a book. Many of them became very popular because Europeans were curious about this experiment in America.

"Karl Neidhard wrote, in 1834, in translation. He said about John Allen, 'A few years ago he had considerably less than nothing, now he lives like a prince in a magnificent house. His property increases daily.' No wonder! The half acre building lots which cost him 75 cents are selling for several hundred dollars each.

"Ann wrote regularly back to her sons as soon as they were old enough to understand. John, the older son, did not turn out well. He became an alcoholic. Nothing of his possessions survive today. Thomas, her younger son, saved many of her letters but not all.

"Happily, Sarah McCue, Ann's great-granddaughter, carefully preserved these letters except for those her father unfortunately loaned to Mrs. Anderson. Miss McCue presented the originals to the Bentley Historical Library. She also presented this Bible to the Washtenaw County Historical Society.

"It's from her letters to her son that we learn a lot about Ann in Ann Arbor. My story would be much less complete without those letters.

## CAPTAIN SPARES BARN, GOES ON TO GREATER THINGS

"A story is remembered by the family that during the Civil War a squad of soldiers came to burn the barn at Belvidere.

"Thomas was then an invalid. His wife went out to meet the young captain who had the squad that was burning barns and mills in the Shenandoah Valley under direction of General Sheridan. and presented him a gold piece and asked him not to burn the barn.

"She said he was a delightful young man, so polite, and ordered his soldiers not to burn the barn.

"Years later, as an old lady, Ann's daughter-in-law was looking at a newspaper in Staunton and recognized the man who had spared the barn. He was running for president. His name was McKinley!

"It's a delightful story. I wish I could document it thoroughly. I can prove that McKinley was in the area. He was a captain, recently appointed. He was assigned to Gen. Sheridan's Army.

"It may well be he did spare the barn and kept the gold piece, much to the disturbance of my youngest son who is a major in the Air Force. He said no captain could have done that."

"I will quote a portion of a letter from 1834:

'This place improves quite fast. Immigration to Michigan is great. We have, I might say, a great many from all parts--from New York state, New England, quite a number from England and countries adjacent, Ireland, Scotland and a number of German Swiss.' (Notice she doesn't mention any southern states.)

'There are three daily stages from this place. Elizabeth and James (children of John by his first wife) enjoy themselves quite well. They live with Grandma. (John's father died here in 1828.)

'Mr. Allen just returned from New York where he has been on business for a few weeks.

'We have Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopal places of worship and also, I am sorry to say, a building just finished for a Universalist Church. The court house is completed this summer.

'I long to see you. The distance is great and suitable company not to be had. (A woman could not travel alone.) I do not despair of seeing you again, if God gives me health.'

"I thought she writes fairly well.

"In spring 1835, Ann's sons, John, 19, and Thomas, 17, made a journey to Hillsboro, Ohio, to see their Uncle Andrew who moved there years before and John came on to see his mother. Thomas remained in Ohio.

"Ann was delighted to see John though she began worrying soon after this about John's drinking habits. After John's departure, Ann wrote to her son, Thomas. 'Your brother has left us for Ohio. I need not describe to you my disappointment in not seeing you. I'm afraid if you ever had any love for your mother it is long gone from you. If you have forgotten your Ma she has not forgotten you.'

"I think Thomas was very hurt by this and he came the next summer, at age 18, in 1836. I'm sure it was a joyful time in Ann's life. However, a month later John Allen announced that they were going on a trip to New York, that James and Elizabeth must be placed in school in Livingston County, New York. He had learned about two schools, one for girls, one for boys. The one for boys grew. It now is Syracuse University.

"Elizabeth, as a young girl of 18, would need female company. Ann must go for that reason. So, Sarah was left with Grandma Allen and they set out. I can imagine Ann hated terribly to leave her son, Thomas, in Ann Arbor though she made him promise to stay until she came back. In fact, he started school here.

"They went to Livingston County and dropped James and Elizabeth off to their respective schools. Then, Ann was taken on in their carriage to Saratoga Springs, a resort for the rich at that time, I know she wrote a letter from there to Thomas that did not survive.

"John went on to New York City. Soon after they got back from that trip or perhaps on the way back John announced that he was going permanently to New York City. This was in 1836. I suppose it was the zenith of John's success financially.

"By that time he owned literally thousands of acres of Michigan land. He also owed thousands of dollars, much of that to New York merchants.

"He got to the point that he was such an expert in land buying that I have a record

of a Col. Brooks, in Detroit, giving him $10,000 to invest for him and John, after three years, could keep half the earnings and return the investment plus half the earnings to Col. Brooks.

"John Allen's mother worried about this in one of her letters to her grandson, James, going to school in New York. She knew there were some awful debts in New York and she worried about John going to New York.

"Ann wrote to her son, Thomas, while they were getting ready to move to New York. 'Mr. Allen (She always called him Mr. Allen. I think most Southern ladies did.) returned the middle of the week you left. He has purchased a small carriage for us to go in to New York. James, the hostler, goes in a covered wagon and carries our baggage.

'We start next Monday which is November 21,1836, to go by land to Monroe and intersect with the national road somewhere in Ohio. There was quite a fall of snow here yesterday, a dull prospect for good roads. I dread my journey but I think it is for the best that we go by land. It got too late to cross the lake.'

"John's son and daughter remained in school in New York state during this time but 13-year-old Sarah went with her parents to live in New York City. Upon their arrival, Sarah wrote a letter. (I think much of Ann's time in Ann Arbor had been spent educating her daughter, reading to her, practicing and so on. I think at age 13 she wrote remarkably well.)

"This letter is dated the day after Christmas. They had traveled from November 21 to December 25 to get to New York City, a five weeks journey. Sarah wrote to tell about the journey to her brother.

'We had quite a pleasant trip. I will give you a short description of it. We came in our carriage to Columbia in Pennsylvania. We also had a lumber wagon to carry our baggage. James, the groom, drove the cream-colored horses on the baggage wagon and Pa drove the white horses on the carriage to Columbia.

'Then we took the railroad to Philadelphia and took our baggage with us and James went with the four horses and carriage around the turnpike. Then we took the steamboat to "Borden town." From there we went by the cars to Amboy and from there in a steamboat to New York. I liked riding in the cars very much, (I suspect this was Sarah's first train trip.)

"Ann added, 'I perceive Sarah has left some room for me to write. Sarah says we had a pleasant journey. For the time of year the road was better than we could expect but the journey was quite fatiguing for me. The weather was cold.

'Mr. Allen had been trying to get a house and at last has obtained one. I cannot tell you whether he has bought or rented. It is a pleasant, convenient house quite up in the city.

'I have found no acquaintance but the family we boarded with a few days ago. I have some letters of introduction from friends in Ann Arbor to their friends in the city.'

"This house was on Seventh Avenue around the corner from 14th Street and for his business John rented, of all places, 44 Wall Street, two doors from the New York Stock and Exchange Board. He called his company the American Exchange Company.

"In March, 1837, he agreed to purchase another house for $16,000 on Broadway. It was a three-story brick dwelling on lot 766 that he had documented in his papers. That was a tremendous amount of money in 1837 with which to buy a house.

"In one of Ann's letters she mentioned that Sarah had a tutor full time. Ann had a housekeeper and she was once again living in comfort as she had for a number of years in Ann Arbor after John made money.

"But those of you who remember your economic history know 1836-37 was not a good time to start a company in New York City. There was something called the Panic of 1837, very similar to what happened in 1929.

"Happily for Ann she had an opportunity to go to Virginia to visit her family. She went before John realized what was happening. She went by carriage with the groom to drive. She had written to Thomas as to whether the groom might get a job in the Staunton area while she was visiting

"John McCue by this time had come of age. He was living on the father's farm, the farm that Dr. McCue had purchased with Ann's money in 1815, and he had the two old house slaves with him with their children, Henry and Sally, along with a number of other slaves.

"When Ann Allen left for Virginia, John knew that something was going to happen, but he didn't have any idea it was going to wipe him out.

"Ann remained one year in Virginia. Visits were long in those days but I doubt that she really expected to stay a year when she first went. In that year, she became increasingly concerned about her son John's future, something she would mention many times in her letters.

"John Allen sent word to her at some point after a year, in the summer of 1838, to return to New York with the carriage and the groom to return to Ann Arbor. I don't know how much he told her of the actual difficulties but she had to stop at Baltimore to borrow money from John McKim to get the rest of the way, money that she still owed when John McKim died.

"On July 16,1838, John wrote a letter, that's been preserved, to William Woodbridge, a rich man in Detroit who later became the second governor of Michigan. John owed him money, as he did many people. Obviously, Woodbridge had written about the debt.

"Allen wrote, 'In money matters, to use a common saying, I'm used up.'

"John was ever the optimist. When he got back to Ann Arbor he opened a law office. While selling land he studied law as one did in those days, reading law with a prominent lawyer in town.

"In another letter to William Woodbridge after he was here a while, 'You no doubt think its strange that I do not, or cannot, raise the requisite funds but strange as it may appear, it is nevertheless true that I am at present unable to raise $10.'

"He goes on, 'I will state, however, (in his optimistic way), that you need have no fear as the result of ultimate payment. I hope soon to obtain my property again so as to be able to have means. I would have been in Detroit several days ago had I possessed the means of paying expenses.'

"While John was confident that he could regain his wealth, Ann was humiliated. They lived in the Exchange in a rented room when they got back, not in a fine, brick house. That was lost to Col. Brooks to whom he owed $10,000.

"I think Ann was in utter despair at this point and her remaining years in Ann Arbor were sad ones. I can tell simply by quoting from her letters to her son.

'July 30, 1839: We keep house in a small house owned by James C. Allen, Mr. Allen's son. We live on a small scale. Mr. Allen has gone west again. He could not tell me how long he should be gone. Before he started he said when he returned he thought he should go to Texas this winter. His mind is as unsettled as ever.

'He has given up that brick house we used to live in to Col. Brooks. We live as we can adopting the strictest economy. I am poor. I cannot command a shilling.'

'July 9,1841: I am poor and needy. I cannot have even the cheapest calico dress without someone gives me the means to purchase it. If Mr. Allen makes anything he never has a cent to spend on clothing for me. He makes out to feed us--that seems hard work.

'When I look forward all is darkness. When I look back all I had is gone to the four winds. Sarah does not go to school. She stays home and helps me work. She occasionally sews a little for a friend and they give her something that helps her along.

'So this is the way we get along in this troublesome world and I can see nothing

to cause me to think these times will alter for the better for me. Sarah is young and may hope but all my hopes are realized in disappointments.'

'August 15,1842: Mr. Allen, I think, will leave for St. Louis in November. He wants to get another new home. How pleased I should be if he were of a contented disposition. I know he could make a living here if that was all the object.

'The times are excessive hard with us. We live by the strictest economy. We make our wants but few. We keep no servant. I cannot tell you whether we shall board or what as Mr. Allen does not communicate his intentions to me.

'February 12,1844: (This is the last letter she wrote from Ann Arbor. There is much about John and worrying about John McCue back in Virginia. It concludes with these sentences to Thomas):

'My situation here is very precarious as it regards my domestic home. Mr. Allen changes not. Our family of late has much increased. We are boarding a family name of Gott that consists of wife , husband and child, a partner in the law office. We do keep a girl to assist the work.

'Much I have to say, Thomas, which I cannot transmit to paper.'

"Ann's son, John McCue, had become an alcoholic, they called him traveling John back in Virginia. A trustee was finally appointed to manage what he had left, a man named Imboden who became a general in Lee's army and was the general who took the wounded troops back to Virginia from Gettysburg.

"In 1844, Thomas was now married and had a child and named the child Ann Barry McCue. He had already used his inheritance when he reached 21 to buy a 500 acre farm. There was a house on it. Later, he would build a house now called Belvidere, a mansion that Ann would live in.

"In the spring of 1844, Thomas came to Ann Arbor-- I cannot tell you by what means he traveled--to take his mother back to Virginia. She was now 47 years old.

"Ann and her daughter went back and lived with Thomas. Sarah was married, in Virginia, on January 20,1848. She married a physician named Addison Waddell.

"Ann spent most of her time in New Hope with her daughter and her husband but had long stays with Thomas and his family at this new home, built in 1852, called Belvidere. Apparently there was no contact between her and John Allen during these years.

"Turner Allen in his account says his brother and Ann, not living happy together, agreed to separate. There was never a divorce but I think that John did not protest when Thomas came to get his mother and take her back to Virginia.

"John became a state senator. He was running for the senate at the time Thomas came to get his mother.

"John had never been a church member, I'm sure much to Ann's distress, but in 1844 he joined a church, the Church of New Jerusalem, established on the teachings of a man named Swedenborg. I think it still exists.

"It flourished in Michigan for a few years. Swedenborg said he had visited heaven three different times. It was a scandalous church in Ann's view.

"I am sure no one was surprised when, on March 11,1851, John Allen joined the gold rush to California at age 53, one of the older men. He got there. He wrote back wonderful letters to the editor of the newspaper and to his mother, who was still living in Ann Arbor, describing the journey and how much every thing cost. It cost $200 to get there the way he went, by the Isthmus, meeting a ship on the other side.

"Whether Ann knew of his going to California, whether she even knew of his death, I do not know. Sarah, his daughter, had written to her father in 1847 when she was going to get married asking for a present. I don't know if he responded.

"I think Ann lived a very contented life in Virginia for the next 30 years except for the Civil War coming along. New Hope, where she spent much of her time with her daughter, was only two miles from the Battle of Piedmont that marked the loss of the Shenandoah Valley to the Yankees. Wounded soldiers were sheltered in Belvidere.

"A granddaughter remembered Ann as an old lady. 'She was rather small and frail-looking, a very interesting talker, a good reader. I remember the double window in my mother's room where my grandmother would read aloud. There were three steps by the window. (This was in Belvidere--I sat on the three steps in 1978.) I would slip in when I heard her reading and sit on those steps.

'I heard her speak of her trip to Michigan that she took on horseback in 1824, carrying her little daughter in her lap the entire way. How frightened she was when they camped near an Indian camp and she expected to be scalped as night came on.

'(She said that) frequently an old Indian would come to their house and sit by the chimney corner for hours and smoke his pipe and only now and then make a grunt.

'They would come for salt. You always had to be particular to fill the vessel level full for they would not have it any other way.

'Her Irish accent was attractive to me. She always said "me own" and spoke of her dress as "me frock."

"But Ann had many sorrows in her passing years. Her son, John, squandered his inheritance. It was true, Thomas had prospered. Thomas died June 11,1865, age 47. John died the following year, February 22,1866, so she lost both her sons.

"She became blind and deaf. She died on November 27, five days after her 78th birthday in 1875.

"She had accumulated a few hundred dollars, primarily through John's paying her for land that he had sold, of which a third really belonged to her. In her will she left $25 for a tombstone for herself and $25 for her son, John.

"A cousin of Sarah's husband who knew Ann well wrote a tribute to her after she died. He said she was a lady of no ordinary character and remarkable for her strength of character. So ends the story of Ann Allen."

***Editor's Note:*** *Dr. Russell Bidlack is the author of Ann Arbor's First Lady, Events in the Life of Ann I. Allen to be published this spring by University of Michigan's Bentley Historical Library. He is also the author of John Allen and The Founding of Ann Arbor, 1962.*

## AROUND THE COUNTY

**Salem Historical Society:** 6 p.m. Thursday, March 20, Salem Township Hall. Potluck dinner, annual meeting, election of officers. Program: Historic show and tell.

**Saline Society:** 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 19, Depot Museum, 402 N. Ann Arbor St. Gladys Saborio and Joanne Rasmussen will talk about *"The Sauk Trail, Michigan Avenue Heritage Route Project."*

Museum open Saturdays, 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Present exhibit *"Saline and Salt."*

**Webster Society:** 7:45 p.m. Monday, April 14, in new Webster Township Hall, 5665 Webster Church Rd. Society members will talk about township history..

**Ypsilanti Society**: Museum, 220 N. Huron St., open 2-4 p.m. Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays. Archives open 9 a.m.-noon Monday-Friday.

## WELL-TRAVELED 300-YEAR-OLD HUGUENOT BIBLE, ANN ALLEN'S PRIZE POSSESSION, PRESENTED TO WCHS

I want to tell you the story of the Bible, Dr. Bidlack said. It was carried by Ann's great-great-grandfather, Richard Barry, as a refugee from France to Ireland.

The title page has been removed. I suspect he tore it out so it wouldn't be detected as a Huguenot Bible. Happily there is another title page at the beginning of the Psalms which proves it was printed in Paris in 1668.

It was brought to America by Ann's father, Thomas Barry, in 1767. It went back to Ireland with Ann, probably in 1801 and it came back with her in 1806 with her Grandma.

According to the great-great granddaughter and her sisters that I once met this was her prize possession. She decided it should pass to her oldest granddaughter.--remember I told you Thomas had a daughter named for Ann, his mother, born in 1844.

Ann presented her granddaughter the Bible on her 18th birthday. Sadly, the granddaughter died the following year. The Bible remained at Belvidere.

In my work on Ann Allen, Miss Sarah McCue, the last surviving great-great granddaughter, sent letters to Bentley Library. Then she wrote one day and said she had decided the proper place for the Bible was really Ann Arbor.

I had the honor of presenting it to the Washtenaw County Historical Society for her. I had it restored by James Craven of Bentley Library because it was somewhat worn. It is now in excellent condition.

When WCHS has completed its museum and has a proper case for it, will be on display there.

## APRIL TOPIC ANNOUNCED

Grace Shackman, local history writer, will present a slide show about *"The History of Washtenaw County Villages--Dexter, Chelsea, Manchester and Saline."* It will be at 2 p.m. Sunday, April 20 in the Saline District Library, 555 N. Maple, Saline.

## HOW TO JOIN

Please send name, address and phone number with check or money order payable to WCHS Membership, c/o Patty Creal, Treasurer, P.O. Box 3336, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-3336.

Annual dues are individual, $15; couple/family, $25; student or senior (60+), $10; senior couple, $19; business association, $50; patron, $100. Information: 662-9092.

## ARTIFACTS TO DONATE?

Anyone wishing to donate an artifact to WCHS should contact Judy Chrisman, collections chair, at 769-7859 or by mail, 1809 Dexter Ave., Ann Arbor, MI 48103.

## WHAT'S IT, LOAN BOX MAKING ROUNDS

WCHS's new loan box, *"Life Before Electricity,"* and the What's It games are making the rounds. They went to Abbot School last month and were scheduled at King and the Hebrew School in March, Arlene Schmid reported.

Teachers may rent the loan box for $15. The games are presented free. Information: 665-8773.

## THANKS, LADIES

Thanks are due Arlene Schmid and Pauline Walters for furnishing refreshments at the February and November meetings, respectively.

## CERTIFICATES OFFERED

Hand-lettered certificates are offered free of charge, framed if desired, by WCHS to organizations, businesses, schools, etc. for milestone anniversaries. Information: 663-8826.


Editor: Alice Ziegler, 663-8826
Address: 537 Riverview Dr., Ann Arbor, MI 48104
Mailing: Caroline Mohai, 663-6106
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**WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

**FIRST PLANT NURSERY**

**2 p.m. Sunday**
**March 16, 1997**

**LADIES LITERARY CLUB**
**218 N. Washington Street**
**Ypsilanti, Michigan**
**(See Map Page 1)**

YPSILANTI MUSEUM
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YPSILANTI MI 48197


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